

The Issue of North Korea

North Korea (officially the Democratic People's Republic of Korea) has one of the world's largest conventional military forces which, combined with its missile and nuclear tests and aggressive rhetoric, has been a huge cause for concern worldwide. Yet world powers have shown themselves to be incapable of preventing the growth of their nuclear programmes. North Korea's economy and impoverished population are increasingly cut off from the global economy each day under a harsh totalitarian state. Kim Jong-un remains committed to demonstrating unquestioned military might. Thus, it comes as no surprise that North Korea spends nearly a quarter of its GDP on its military whilst 60% of its population live in poverty. North Korea's continued false promises to the UN to denuclearise has led an increasing threat from this highly unstable country. To understand how North Korea has become such a huge global threat we must look to its history:

After World War II Korea was divided at the 38th parallel. The Soviet Union was given control of administering the North, causing an authoritarian form of government to form. With the financial and military backing of the USSR and China, North Korea built up a strong army and on June 25, 1950, North Korea made a surge into South Korea. The Korean War that followed pulled in forces from the United Nations, the United States, and China, as well as military advisors from the USSR. It lasted until 1953, when the Korean Armistice Agreement was signed. This re-established the line of division at the 38th parallel, with a demilitarized zone extending two kilometres in both directions. In the 1970s, North Korea's economy declined, causing reliance upon foreign loans. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s international tensions mounted as North Korea announced its growing nuclear program. At the same time, relations between North and South Korea were highly variable: the countries co-hosted the 1988 Seoul Olympics, yet economic cooperation ultimately failed.

At the turn of the 1990s, both North Korea and South Korea officially joined the United Nations. Throughout the 1990s, North Korea continually failed to follow through with promises of closing/freezing various parts of its nuclear program and of allowing international inspectors to examine their nuclear capabilities in exchange for oil and aid (a common theme for decades to come). North Korea's nuclear ambitions were largely overshadowed by famine in the late 1990s after the country suffered first through horrific flooding and then through drought. North Korea now relies upon international aid to keep its citizens fed. In 2005, North Korea announced that it had completed its first underground nuclear test. Kim Jong-il died on December 17, 2011, and his son, Kim Jong-un, took power; his leadership has largely been characterized by increased nuclear pursuits and other military provocations. In violation of the UN Security council resolutions, North Korea continues nuclear enrichment and long- range missile development efforts with an estimated nuclear arsenal of between 6-60 nuclear weapons. Individual countries such as the US have passed their own unilateral sanctions against North Korea, and following the ICBM, in August 2017 the UN Security council unanimously passed its harshest sanction yet. It targeted some of the most important sources of revenue for the regime including North Korean exports and banning the country from sending more workers abroad.

North Korea is additionally believed to possess some biological weapons capabilities (although it acceded to the Geneva Protocol in 1988). It can allegedly produce pathogens

including anthrax, smallpox, and pest (plague), although its ability to weaponize them is unclear. Furthermore, it has been frequently linked to cyber-attacks, demonstrating its ability to devastate critical infrastructure systems and infiltrate military, government, and intelligence networks. Cyberattacks on South Korean banks and media outlets, as well as the 2014 Sony Pictures hack, have been traced back to groups with ties to North Korea. Moreover, North Korea is in a category of its own when it comes to human rights. The totalitarian state continues to enslave and torture tens of thousands of people as well as digitally and physically isolating its people amongst other forms of abuse to their human rights.

Recently, there have been steps towards diplomatic reproachment between North and South Korea with officials attending the Opening Ceremony of the Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, South Korea. On April 27, a week after announcing that North Korea would freeze weapons and missile testing, North Korean Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un stepped across the border into South Korea for a summit with South Korean President Moon Jae-in. The leaders signed a joint statement pledging to work toward denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and an official end to war between the two countries. In June 2018, President Donald J. Trump and Kim Jong-un met in Singapore and released a joint statement about denuclearization. Yet since these developments if anything tensions have further risen as Kim Jon- un remains committed to strengthening North Korea's military, no matter the cost to his people.

Points to consider?

- Is your nation at risk from North Korea's nuclear advancements? Has your nation imposed any sanctions on North Korea?
- Is it possible to achieve peaceful denuclearisation of North Korea despite its extensive history of failing to adhere to UN policy?
- How can the human rights issues be addressed? Does your country provide aid to the people of North Korea?
- Will North Korea and South Korea ever reunify? How can this be done peacefully?
- Is there a way of investigating North Korea's biological and cyberwarfare?
- What would be the wider geopolitical consequences of allowing North Korea to continue to strengthen its military weaponry and continued abuse of human rights?

Useful Links:

<https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/north-korea-crisis>
<https://www.cfr.org/background/north-korea-nuclear-weapons-missile-tests-military-capabilities>
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-41174689>
<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/issues/north-korea>
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/co-idprk/commission-inquiry-on-h-rin-dprk>
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